

Montana Commission on Community Service
AmeriCorps National Service
Request For Proposal (RFP)
Planning Grants 2003/04



- ❖ Thank you for your interest in the AmeriCorps National Service planning grants. This packet contains the information you requested pertaining to the application process for 2003/04 AmeriCorps planning grants through the Montana Commission on Community Service.
- ❖ Eligible grantees include nonprofit organizations in compliance with IRS Section 501(c)(3) regulations; schools; institutions of higher education; state agencies; subdivisions of the state including cities, counties, and municipalities; Indian Tribes; or a partnership or collaboration of any of the above entities.
- ❖ Individual technical assistance is available to all prospective applicants from May 17, 2004-June 30, 2004. Please contact the Montana Commission on Community Service (MCCS) at 406/444-9077.
- ❖ Grant applications are due by 4:30pm June 30, 2004 at the Montana Commission office (1 unbound original and 4 copies). Applications submitted by mail must be received on that date, not postmarked by that date. Faxes will not be accepted. The Commission's address is P.O. Box 200801, Helena, Montana 59620.
- ❖ **For additional information, contact Will Soller at the Montana Commission on Community Service at 406/444-9077 or wsoller@state.mt.us**

The Montana Commission on Community Service seeks to renew the ethic of civic responsibility in Montana by encouraging all citizens to engage in full or part-time service to the state. Established in 1993, the Commission is a state agency funded primarily by the Corporation for National Service.

OVERVIEW

AmeriCorps is a community service program that provides full and part-time opportunities for participants, called members, to serve their communities through community organizations and agencies. AmeriCorps programs strive to meet real community needs in the areas of education, the environment, public safety, other human needs, and most recently homeland security. AmeriCorps is locally driven and community based, with a specific mission to: Get Things Done, Strengthen Communities, and Member Development. During their term of service, most AmeriCorps members receive a living allowance; full-time members are eligible for health care and childcare if needed. Members who successfully complete a term of service receive an Educational Award.

AmeriCorps is one of many National Service programs funded by the Corporation for National and Community Service, a federal agency created under the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993. Under this same legislation, states were required to establish community service commissions to provide a coordinated response to National Service programming in the state. Prior to the Act, the Montana Legislature approved the Governor's Advisory Council on Community Service, now the Montana Commission on Community Service, as a statutory agency in 1993.

Planning Grant Concept

Recognizing the value of the planning grant process for organizations interested in exploring the viability of creating and sustaining an AmeriCorps program to meet their needs, the Commission is accepting planning grant applications in the development of a strong AmeriCorps program design.

The purpose of planning grants is to bring programs to the verge of implementation so that they may compete successfully for operating assistance in the following grant cycle. The Commission will make planning grants available to eligible applicants that have identified a sound concept for a national service program, but that require resources in order

to plan, develop, and prepare the program for implementation.

Commission expectations for all planning grants are as follows: 1.) organizations are expected to develop and submit a fully realized AmeriCorps grant application within 24 months of the planning grant; or 2.) submit a report outlining the reasons why it was decided not to pursue a full AmeriCorps grant.

Commission Priorities

The Commission has identified 1.) Education Award Programs, 2.) Program Planning and Evaluation Activities, and 3.) Homeland Security as priorities.

Education Award Programs

While the Commission welcomes proposals for any sound planning concept, it has placed a priority on Education Award Only (EAO) Programs. With the EAO Program, members only receive an educational award for time served, with no additional benefits such as the traditional stipend associated with full-time members. The EAO program can present a special challenge to sponsoring organizations, since CNCS currently provides up to \$400 per full-time equivalent member to carry out the national service program. A sponsoring organization typically will have to use non-Corporation sources to support the program. At the same time, since CNCS is making a substantial investment of federal resources by providing education awards for members of Education Award programs, organizations are expected to incorporate as many of the key elements of the AmeriCorps guidelines as possible. For more information, please contact the commission.

Program Planning and Evaluation Activities

The Commission also sees the value in developing evaluation models to assess and identify the results of AmeriCorps activities. These results will be used by existing programs to strengthen effectiveness.

To that end, the Commission is accepting proposals that center on the development of evaluation models that can document the impact AmeriCorps programs can have on 1.) the communities and agencies in which they operate and 2.) on the member participants who deliver services. Applicants should keep in mind that the Commission is seeking to develop a model that can be used to evaluate both current and future AmeriCorps activities.

Homeland Security

With the recent events of our nation, it is more important than ever for our communities to be prepared in the event of a disaster, natural or otherwise. Meeting this challenge will require action on many fronts, including tapping the Montana's volunteer and national service resources.

The Commission welcomes proposals that demonstrate how AmeriCorps programs can play a vital role in Montana's Homeland Security network.

Budget Requirements

Grants are limited to \$20,000. Requested funds may not exceed 67 percent of the program's total costs. The grantee's share of these costs is 33 percent and may be in the form of cash or in-kind contributions.

Grants Process

The Commission will review and select planning program proposals. The following timeline will be followed:

5/15/04-6/15/04	Individual technical assistance call window open for prospective applicants.
6/30/04	Grant applications due by 4:30pm at MT Commission office.
July 2004	Applications reviewed and rated by peer committee.
August 2004	Successful proposals sent to the Corporation.
September 2004	Final awards issued, programs begin.

National Priorities

Issue areas. The National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993 identified four areas for National Service program concentration: education, public safety, the environment, and other human needs. All AmeriCorps programs must address at least one of the national issue areas. The Commission will continue to encourage programs to develop issue area specialization instead of trying to meet all of the national issue areas. Program experience to date indicates that it is difficult to demonstrate impact on communities when programs try to meet many needs all at once. Most recently, the Corporation has added Homeland Security as a fifth national issue area.

eGrants

In addition to a paper submission, the Commission will require all applications to be submitted online on an electronic system called eGrants. For more information, please contact Will Soller at 444-9077.